

Priscus Attalus

(Mid 4th Century – c. 416)



BRIEFING

Priscus Attalus (Greek: Πρίσκος Ἀτταλος, died after 416) was twice Roman usurper (in 409–10 and in 414–5), against Emperor Honorius, with Visigothic support. Originally a pagan, he was eventually baptized as an Arian Christian, thus becoming the last pretender to the Roman imperial office who did not profess Nicene Christianity.

BIOGRAPHY

Priscus Attalus was a Greek from the Roman province of Asia, whose father had moved to Italy under Valentinian I. Attalus was an important senator in Rome, who served as *praefectus urbi* in 409. He was twice proclaimed emperor by the Visigoths in an effort to impose their terms on the ineffectual Emperor Honorius, who was based in Ravenna.

Attalus held the title of Emperor in Rome for a few months 409–410, and later in Burdigala again for a few months in 414–415. The first reign ended when Alaric believed it was hampering his negotiations with Honorius, and the second ended after he was abandoned by the Visigoths and eventually captured by Honorius's men. Attalus was obliged to participate in the triumph Honorius celebrated in the streets of Rome in 416, before finishing his days exiled in the Aeolian Islands.

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For references to primary sources, see entries in *RE* or the *PLRE*. Translations of much of the source material can be found in C.D. Gordon (*The Age of Attila: Fifth-Century Byzantium and the Barbarians* [Ann Arbor, 1960]) and R.C. Blockley (*Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire* [Liverpool, 1983], vol. 2).